

INDONESIA

MELLEMA, R. L. *Wayang Puppets: Carving, Colouring, Symbolism*. Bulletin 315. Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute, 1989. 84 pages. Illustrations, index, bibliography. Paper fl20.00; ISBN 90 6832 026 2.

This curious little book actually consists of two even smaller books. Pages 12 through 44 consist of a translation of a Javanese text on the subject of the carving and painting of Javanese shadow puppets. The text was written by a Javanese puppetmaker named Sukir, and it was published in Batavia (now Jakarta) in 1920. Mellema (1899–1987), a Dutchman who studied Javanese language and literature, thought it worthwhile to translate the text (presumably into Dutch, since Mantle Hood is listed as the English translator of the whole volume), rescuing it from the oblivion that was its sure fate as long as it was obtainable only in Javanese, and in Javanese script to boot. Realizing perhaps that the detailed description of how a shadow puppet looks and how it is made would prove of little interest to people lacking a general knowledge of the tradition, however, Mellema also thought it worthwhile to provide a few introductory remarks on the variety of *wayang* (so not just shadow plays, but also related genres, such as wooden puppets and dance performances in which humans perform similar stories) and their history. Following Sukir's text, Mellema then describes a few of the most important characters that appear in Javanese shadow plays and gives a summary of a performance given at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta in 1952. Finally, he suggests how we might interpret the colors of shadow puppets' faces.

In Sukir's text on the puppets, one finds a remarkable amount of detail about the various kinds of ornamentation, headgear, eyes, clothes, etc. that characterize the figures. Decorative motifs are named, as are elements of characters' apparel, and every item is illustrated with a sketch. In most cases, details of physical appearance and types of costume correspond to a character's temperament and status, and Sukir mentions these correspondences as well. He then embarks on a long description of the manner in which a puppet is painted and further embellished with gold leaf and ink.

All of this naming and sorting is impressive, but I think it would be a mistake to accept it as universally recognized truth among Javanese puppetmakers. Much of it, certainly, is basic and shared: the eye-types are clearly distinguishable and their value as indicators of character type is evident. However, when Sukir discusses colors he makes statements about what colors go with what that might not win everyone's agreement. One wants at least to know whether he is speaking for the Jogjanes tradition or the Solonese one, since the coloring of puppets differs quite markedly in the two court cities. Indeed, it would be very useful to know more about Sukir's background. Still, as a guide to the intricacies of puppets' iconography, Sukir's comments are uniquely detailed and meticulous.

Mellema's own contributions are more diverse. I don't think his introduction of the most familiar characters is as effective as Anderson's *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese*. The story he recounts, "Raden Werkudara as king," as it was given in a particular performance he observed, is interesting, especially for the suggestion that political intrigue in Jakarta at the time of the performance explains a subplot included in it. But his most original contribution consists of the long final chapter in which Mellema tries to account for the various colors shadow puppets' faces are painted. Here I would describe the result as a magnificent failure, and the chapter is more interesting for the light it sheds on a kind of intellectual inquiry than as an illuminating analysis.

Mellema proceeds by taking as his sample puppets found in two Dutch museum

collections, plus the colored plates in KATS's book, *Het Javaansche Tooneel*. He distinguishes four possible colors: red, white, gold, and black, putting aside other colors found on some figures as irrelevant. He succeeds in linking facial color to temperament in a few cases—red for the villainous Dasamuka, white for the virtuous Anoman—but he has much broader ambitions and immediately goes on to a wide-ranging discussion of character and classificatory systems. He discusses the arrangement in space of Javanese palaces (discounting considerable data that contradict his remarks about what direction Javanese houses face) to justify claims that in performance certain figures appear in certain directions. In a move that recalls anthropological treatises of a much earlier era, Mellema adduces data about American Indians, earlier Europeans, and Chinese, to support his claims for the importance of classificatory systems in Java. Finally, citing long passages from nineteenth-century German psychologists who categorized individuals by temperament, Mellema then relates these types to colors, thereby explaining the colors of puppets' faces. One suspects that Mellema himself sensed how tenuous the connection was between the theories he mentions—long-since outmoded by the time of his writing, in 1953—and the shadow puppets he discusses, since he makes only very summary reference to the latter in his final paragraphs.

As an example of one stream of Dutch scholarship, Mellema's ideas have a certain interest, but his approach exhibits the faults of the method—wild leaps across culture areas, convenient dismissal of contradictory material—with little of the synthetic power of a figure such as his predecessor in questions of Javanese traditions, W. H. Rassers. The value of the whole text is diminished by the very awkward translation and by the highly erratic, sometimes simply erroneous, transliteration of Javanese names and terms.

REFERENCES CITED:

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1965 *Mythology and the tolerance of the Javanese*. Modern Indonesia Project. Monograph Series. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, Dept of Asian Studies.

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1923 *Het Javaansche tooneel; I. Wajang Poerwa*. Weltevreden: Commissie voor de Volkslectuur.

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CENTRAL ASIA

BASILOV, V. N., editor. *Drevnie obryady, verovaniya i kul'ty narodov Srednej Azii. Istoriko-etnograficheskie ocherki* [Ancient rituals, beliefs, and cults of Central Asian peoples. A historico-ethnographical survey]. Moskva: Nauka, 1986. 208 pages. (In Russian)

Ancient Rituals, Beliefs, and Cults of Central Asian Peoples is a collection of eight articles dedicated mainly to the farming societies of Soviet Central Asia. This area is generally accepted to be an Islamic world. But here the contributors touch on those festivals and rituals that are not part of Islam. They describe in detail their observations in the field and then try to dig down to the deeper roots of the festivals